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## ROME, THE UNFINISHED AND UNKEMPT

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It has become a very refreshing diversion for latter-day students in Roman topography to turn from the contemplation of ruins and excavations to the numerous so-called restorations with which artists have illumined our texts and classrooms. The three pathetic columns of Castor's Temple are thus, as it were, re-created when made to contribute to the whole restored structure. Caesar's deity becomes more a fact to us when, unhypnotized by the echoes of Shakespeare's play, but out of the hemicycle in that scarred podium, we can reconstruct the real Aedes Divi Iuli.

But one familiar with the aspects of modern metropolises cannot fail to observe in these restorations of old Rome, delightful as they are, the absence of something, or, it may be, the presence of a something, which is somehow disconcerting. After all their reality there is yet a quite perceptible air of *unreality* about them, which prompts one to query wherein Rome could have been so essentially unlike New York or London of today. Convinced as we are that human nature has not appreciably altered during all these centuries since the days of Caesar and Cicero—assured too that the Roman still largely exists in ourselves and in his lineal descendants of Romance countries—what is it, we ask, that makes these beautiful reconstructions of Rome look so unearthly, as different from ordinary worldly creations as if they were glimpses from some other planet?

A glance at some of the earlier attempts at restoration is sufficient to eliminate them from the discussion, for the manifest absence of the human element brands them at once as unnaturally stilted and mechanical. Two or three decades ago, Canina's drawings were about all that were available, the "pictured page" of Duruy's *History* bearing very evident testimony to the popularity of the same, for inserts of Canina's restorations are quite generously

sprinkled throughout. Not to speak of their extravagance and their appeal to an exaggerated imagination, Canina's drawings are colorless, lifeless shells. The spell as of the *Dornröschen* is over them all—no *Königsohn* in sight to kiss away the doom of sleep.

Ziegler's manual, *Das alte Rom*, in reproducing Canina's designs, perpetuates the old dead style that once prevailed. Looking at the illustrations in this text, we feel like lonesome survivors in pestilence-stricken London or like Gauls invading deserted Rome after the Allia. We long to peep around that corner yonder and discover whether old Papirius is not seated somewhere. It would be well worth a rap over the head from the old man's staff, to have a pull at his gray beard—not to be insolent, of course, but just to greet a human being. Just think of the vast hall of Caracalla's Baths—in all that magnificent immensity not a soul to gossip with. It is a phantom Rome that Canina and Ziegler and their class have bequeathed to us, as silent as if the voice of Allah had thundered at low twelve, in true *Arabian Nights* style, blasting to stone all the worshipers of fire.

The presence of human beings, however, no matter how multifarious their appearance, does not by any means constitute the sole valid claim to realism. In fact, the greater number of attempts at restoration give large place to the human element. Their Forum, it must be confessed, is often quite alive with togas and fasces and sacrificial smoke and oratorical gesticulation. And, as for attempting to depict lifelike poses and characteristically human attitudes in the Liliputs scattered over the Forum or through the colonnades of the basilicas, the scenes are usually too small to admit the possibility of our appreciating such peculiarities or idiosyncrasies. At best, it is just a mob of pygmies. It would take a microscope to bring out, if it were there, the patch on the back of Geta's tunic as he stands gawking up at Domitian's equestrian statue; or the black patch on Attorney Regulus' forehead, as he comes down the steps from Juno Moneta and smirks patronizingly at Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus; or the curtains of the Vestal Claudia's *lectica*, which a collision with a passing vegetable cart has left torn and dangling at one end. Neither are the usual restorations expressed in colors so that one could distinguish, if

it were there, the purple laticlave of Senator Fonteius Capito, or the grease and grime of the unwashed Julius Helius as he emerges from his cobbler's stall on the Quirinal, or the blood stains on T. Julius Vitalis, fresh from his butcher-shop in the Argiletum.

Yet, with or without human figures, there is something we miss in the usual restorations—Auer, Hülsen, Bühlmann, Lehmann, Bechetti, Marcelliani, Ripostelli, *et alii innumerabiles*, all in the same category. The scenes which they evoke take on a preternaturally spiritual sheen. The Rome they create is too intangibly ethereal, too much like the "Spotless Town" of sapolio advertising fame. Immaculate columns and façades, polished marbles everywhere, an oppressive spickness and spanness at every turn, all remind us more of the New Jerusalem of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* than of a habitation built with hands. We find ourselves wishing that a flaw here or there, or the insertion of an occasional discord, could make these idealizations more "earth, earthy," more consistent with everyday life.

For the pictures are not so small that we could not see, if it were there, a broken cornice on Vespasian's Temple, or an ungainly scaffolding still standing and almost obscuring the façade of the Tabularium, where, we may imagine, a workman had fallen to his death and there was a superstition that the same fate awaited any subsequent employee. It would link us with things terrestrial to note that one of the outer slabs of marble had been wrenched from its place in the podium of Vesta's Shrine, or that the venerable Columna Rostrata had two or three of the Punic beaks tilted out of place, or that there was a great pile of bricks right in front of the Basilica Aemilia where some repairs were in progress.

One cannot visit or live in a thriving, teeming center of today and not be impressed by the verity of contrast between constant decay and just as persistent regeneration. No section is without its ruins, perhaps brought out in yet more somber light by the structure just adjoining, an edifice either in the process of building or only just completed, with the evidences of newness bristling all over it.

And Rome was probably as cluttered with ruins and tumble-down structures as any modern metropolis. A Geiseric or an Alaric

is not the only requisite to ruins, for nature herself will suffice if allowed her will undisturbed. Rome could no more have been the fairy-land of Elysian prospects than many a city which the *Ladies' Home Journal* endeavored a few years ago to convict of slovenliness in high places.

Juvenal can play the rôle of a very neat muck-raker for ancient Rome of the Flavian period. The Temple of Concord, overlooking the Forum from the very base of the Capitoline Hill, he tells us, was in such a state of abandonment that storks were nesting in the forsaken sanctuary and made a great to-do whenever disturbed. And we may well believe that storks' nests were not the sole evidence of Concord's decay that would be observable to the passer-by.

Further witness may be found in the frequency of such phrases as *vetustate corruptum restituit* in dedicatory inscriptions—"so and so has restored such and such a structure that had become impaired through age." Such, for example, is the tenor of Septimius Severus' rededication of the Pantheon and the Templum Sacrae Urbis, or of Arcadius and Honorius' restoration of Pompey's Theater, or of the Prefect Probianus' repairs in the Basilica Julia. These are loud testimonials to the remorseless mallet of time, which was evidently not more sparing in Rome's day than in the annals of Paris and Petrograd. A Trajan with all his magnificence in building schemes for his own Forum could not have escaped sporadic argument of the decay of other buildings elsewhere, buildings that were not so blessed by his gracious attention.

Reasoning from practical analogy, we may be very sure that building activity in any one of Rome's fourteen regions was contemporaneous with collapse or defacement elsewhere—this too notwithstanding all the Augustan *curatores*, and notwithstanding all the *praetores urbani* that may have been like-minded as Verres with the columns of Castor's Temple. The enthusiasm of dedication in the Campus Martius must have brought out in drablike contrast the battered, worn condition of the structures in the old Forum Romanum. And one temple would scarcely be completed, before its predecessor of the reign last closed might stand in need of fresh acroteria or a new flight of steps or another coat of stucco.

But fortunate indeed were the crumbling edifices that felt a restoring hand. Too many of them, *miserable dictu*, were but furthered in their process of decay and degraded to the office of supplying materials for other, newer structures. Already, in the times of the Empire, that deadly germ was beginning to thrive, the bacillus of demolition which, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and the Golden Age of the Papacy, saw old Rome's precious relics contributing wholesale to the rise of the new Rome. The presence of ruinous buildings even in imperial times is abundantly attested by a study of still other imperial structures which are discovered to be composites, made up in large part of the spoils of older buildings. One need only climb to the upper story of the Coliseum and analyze the materials used in the several restorations. Photographs of the topmost courses of masonry on the inside of the Amphitheater reveal beyond any question whence Alexander Severus in 223 and Trajan Decius in 250 obtained the stones for their patchwork. The *mélange* shown there bears sad testimony to the truth that abundant structures were unquestionably existing in Rome, whose ruinous or at least dilapidated condition was accepted as warranting their spoliation.

But far more serious than either the finger of time or the theft of imperial builders or the bludgeon of barbarian was the devastation Rome suffered from conflagration once a century and oftener, great fires that made total ruin of whole districts in the center of the city. It is true, the annals of Rome distinctly predicate the reconstructive measures pursued by the subsequent authorities or by the emperors next succeeding, but in real life there is no magic wand even in the hand of an absolute monarch, no mystic schamir, that can avail to conjure out of a dreary waste of charred débris an immediate Rome of dazzling newness. Dreary the interval that passed after the great fire of Commodus ere the munificence of Severus and Julia Domna could assert itself. The Temple of Vesta, the most vital and central of the cults of Rome, was upward of fifteen years in desolation. Long, long the lapse of time that followed the fire of Carinus, before Diocletian, in the midst of his busy statecraft and his eastern problems, could build Rome's devastated districts. It must have been a dozen years before the

Curia was again ready to house its senate. And it lacked just one year of being full three decades before Maxentius resurrected the Temple of Venus and Rome. A like fate, though often much aggravated, sometimes befell single buildings in local fires. The venerable Temple of Ceres Libera in the Forum Boarium was burned in 31 B.C. Augustus evidently did not give it his attention until nearly the close of his long reign, for Tacitus lists it among the structures which Tiberius completed and dedicated. This was in 17 A.D., lacking but two years of being half a century since its destruction.

Doubtless many of the structures which suffered in a group were compelled to wait long after their fellows were re-established and dedicated anew. Since the majority of the great conflagrations occurred in the times of the Empire, it is some one of the emperors whose name is naturally found associated in varying degrees with each restoration. It is therefore usual to refer the periods of regeneration to the first emperors of consequence succeeding to the Principate after the several disasters. But complete evidence is in many instances lacking. It is purely conjectural to reason, from the presence of an emperor's name in connection with the restoration of one or two buildings, that he was therefore responsible for the renovation of the entire group or entire district. The Atrium Vestae suffered in the same fires that swept away the Temple of Vesta, yet of only one restoration have we a certified ascription. There certainly must have been extended periods when at least great portions of the Forum were no more presentable than today, a litter of ruins and débris.

A most startling revelation is brought to us by the researches of Lanciani on p. 28 of his *Destruction of Ancient Rome*, pertinent to the restoration methods employed by Septimius Severus: "The propylaea of the Porticus Octaviae were restored by him, in the year 203, with sculptured fragments from edifices damaged or ruined by the fire of Titus." No one item can bring more powerful witness to the long-lasting periods that followed devastations. The fire of Titus occurred in 80 A.D.—one hundred and twenty-three years before Severus took it in hand to restore the Octavian Porticus, a century and a quarter in which not only was a historic

monument suffered to lie desolate, but an entire region, the stately Campus Martius, defaced and undignified by the presence of unsightly débris lying in its very center.

But shabby, dilapidated, or even ruinous edifices are often not so conspicuous as are structures in process of building, by reason of the cluttered appearance they give to the neighborhood. A living community is rarely permitted to present a clean, tidy exterior throughout, for some one section is sure to be in disruption through the confusion necessarily entailed by engineering processes. Here a street, perhaps dozens of them, presenting vistas of chaos—a water-main plowing up the whole length of the Bowery, a car-track in reconstruction out on Commonwealth Avenue, a system of telegraph lines being installed through Market Street, new paving being laid over the area of Trafalgar Square. Piles of dirt, hillocks of brick and stone, all sorts of engineering contrivances, networks of scaffolding, mazes of barriers and barricades, all the paraphernalia of construction are invariably to be met with somewhere in the great city.

It is one of the distinguishing features of the Empire, this *Baulust*, may we term it, that seems to have descended upon the emperors, as if a veritable bequest from the master-builders of the Nile and Mesopotamia. With the exception of such periods as that of the Thirty Tyrants and of others in which civil wars were rampant, in all that long illustrious roster of imperatores, not many can be found of whom it may be said, "They left no monument to commemorate their names." The spirit of emulation, the longing, present in the best of them, to excel, if possible, their predecessors in magnificence, was in lineal descent from the first Caesar. And even of those whose names are not marked with asterisks, it may be predicated that only serious interruptions or speedy violence prevented such from contributing their portion, great or small, to the embellishment or the amplification of the capital. A glance at the chronology of construction in Rome will reveal strikingly few interims when building enterprises of some nature or other were not in progress.

What else does Juvenal mean for Rome, when, among the perils incident to life in the city, he catalogues the wagons loaded with



building materials that crowd the narrow thoroughfares and endanger human lives?

Next a long fir pole sways about as it comes along in its cart, and still other teams are hauling a pine beam, both of them nodding on high and threatening the lives of the people. Why! if that dray-load of Ligurian rock should topple over and pour its mountain upon the crowd, what would be left of the unfortunates? Who could pick up the mangled limbs and bones? Their poor bodies would be all crushed to atoms and vanish away like smoke.

And we are not to understand this as an unusual or exaggerated case, this cartoon of Juvenal. Would that we might call him staff-artist of the Roman *Acta Diurna*! It is listed as a customary peril, along with the fall of pots and kettles from upper-story windows, with the chances of fire in the Ghetto or the Subura, with the danger of collapsing buildings, with the ordinary bumps and bruises one may get in trying to thread one's way through a mob of people.

The time element too must not be overlooked, for, with all haste and with brigades of workmen, great constructive enterprises cannot always be consummated in months or even sometimes in years. And, despite the employment of the contract method, we know with more or less definiteness how long a period often passed before the completion of certain buildings in Rome. Surely, if we can interpret aright the records of Rome's history, we may be justified in concluding, on general lines, that construction must frequently have been very seriously interrupted by insurrection and anarchy at home, and by war and turbulence from without, both alike distracting the attention of the imperator and his employees.

The civil wars preceding the establishment of the Principate under Augustus must particularly have left Rome for several decades in an incomplete, decidedly chaotic condition architecturally. Julius Caesar, while still absent in Gaul and later, during the intermittent periods of peace in his dictatorship, had started several most munificent enterprises—the *Saepta Julia* along the Flaminian Way, the Theater of Marcellus out in the Campus Martius, the Basilica Julia in the Forum proper, and his own new Forum with its Temple of Venus Genetrix. But the Ides of March, Philippi, the war with Sextus Pompeius, Actium, were all alike

so many earthquakes, ever deferring the completion of the *opera Caesaris*.

The Saepta, which Caesar began and work on which was continued by Lepidus of the Second Triumvirate, was only finally completed by Agrippa, under the Augustan régime, in 27 B.C., a period of quite a score of years.

The theater begun by Caesar and named by Augustus in honor of the deceased heir-apparent, Marcellus, was not dedicated until 13 B.C., or, according to another account, 11 B.C. It is absurd to say that the theater was under construction during this whole period, but we have every reason to believe that real estate out in the Flaminian Meadows, where the structure was situated, must have greatly deteriorated during this long-distressing interval of over thirty years with all that mussiness and unkemptness thereabouts.

The Basilica Julia had been begun in 54; possibly the clearing away of the old Tabernae had been commenced still earlier, and was unfinished when dedicated by Augustus eight years later. Soon afterward burned, it was rebuilt and reopened in 12 B.C., a checkered genesis covering thirty-two years in all. Surely, adapting Virgil's line, we may murmur, *Tantae molis erat Romam condere*.

All this can lead to but one conclusion—that evidences of construction would be prominent features of the ordinary appearance of Rome. Somewhere in her circuit we should expect to see the confusion of building in process. Still more emphatically it may be asserted that Rome must have been in an almost constant state of disruption or renovation, and was at no time permitted to wear that unblemished smile of perfection and completeness which artists have given her.

After being then so accustomed to the serene perfection habitually depicted in the restorations, for instance, of the Forum, what a shock of surprise it would give us to see, as in a modern photograph, workmen engaged in the construction of Saturn's Temple—no roof yet in place, some of the columns still to be raised, the future flight of steps now supplied by an inclined plankway, up which Rome's Ancient Order of Hodcarriers is descried in the actual

transportation of brick and plaster and mortar for the interior of the cella!

Would it not be refreshing to see a painter's suspension plank swinging out over the façade of the Aemilia, or a sculptor engaged upon the pedimental group of the Temple of Venus and Rome? All this should be no more surprising than the photograph to be seen in Carl Schurz's memoirs, of the Cologne Cathedral as it looked about half a century ago, a derrick adorning the roof, the spires mere stumps.

Why may we not imagine a picture of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna, with a committee from the Senate, inspecting the reconstruction of the Antonine-Faustina Temple, after its destruction in the great fire of Commodus—that is, if it was destroyed then and was restored by Septimius and Julia? Great piles of stone and brick and beds of steaming mortar block the course of the Sacra Via, most of the cella walls are up and some of the lower drums of the columns. An awkward derrick towers above the portico and swings its giant arm out over the Forum. A score or more of bricklayers are swarming up the ladders and over the scaffolds and improvised supports. The emperor is pointing up at the highest course of masonry, calling the Domna's attention to its style of construction, while the leading gentleman of the Senate committee is bending forward, inspecting and testing the concrete work, where the outer slabs of marble are not yet in place.

But waiving all the litter that is due either to construction or to destruction, the comparatively recent science of city sanitation makes one seriously doubt, on general principles alone, whether Rome could have been any more cleanly in her day than were London or Paris of some centuries ago. Is it not logical then to reason that, the farther back we go in time, ancient Rome was a prototype of what we may see today in many southern European capitals and metropolises—Constantinople, for instance, or Naples, or Madrid, or Cartagena? Surely we may account as substantiation for our surmise the ever-increasing rise in the level of the Forum and its astounding precession through twenty-seven different strata, these successive elevations due not so much to a professed *piano regolatore* as to the compulsion of accommodating a new

level to the accumulated rubbish. The door of St. Adriano's is an unanswerable argument for a most untidy public piazza. The tendency in the Forum so early to become a dumping-ground, a cow pasture, and a graveyard must have had its incipency farther back than the demoralization incident to the barbarian invasions. Coupled with all the other items heretofore considered, it seems to point to a lamentable disorder and unkemptness, and this, too, despite the aediles and their supposed prerogatives. It is greatly to be feared that Goth and Vandal rather gave acceleration to a vice inherent in the Romans themselves—a slovenliness and a carelessness in their civic appearance.

So it would seem that all things were not always roseate and without blemish with "*Domina Roma*." It is rather brutal iconoclasm, yet, after all, it is bringing the Eternal City down to a human basis, to a position where we can discover her as subject to the same faults, the same troubles, the same problems as confront the modern city. It gives us a fellow-feeling, a sentiment more of sympathy and appreciation, in lieu of the almost idolatrous adoration the name often demands. We can understand her better, for we know that Rome too, like other cities, had her skeletons, her modicum of mud and dirt, her grime and noisome smells, her vermin and her yellow dogs, her backyards, her patched garments—yet endured and outlived them all.